

Baltimore gets \$2 million for 'sobering center' as part of larger opioid prevention efforts



Baltimore city Health Commissioner Dr. Leana Wen at a news conference at City Hall in January. (Barbara Haddock Taylor / Baltimore Sun)



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Baltimore City will get \$2 million to open a 24-hour "sobering center" to help those addicted to drugs, part of a larger pool of money the state is giving out to every county to fight the heroin and opioid epidemic.

The Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention announced Friday how the more than \$22 million would be distributed among the state's 24 jurisdictions. The money comes from funds the governor committed to fight the opioid epidemic, the federal government's 21st Century Cures Act and the state's crime control and prevention agency.

Eighty percent of the \$22 million will go to local jurisdictions; the rest will be used to fund other efforts and programs, including collaboration between federal, state and local law enforcement, to increase state regulatory

oversight of controlled dangerous substances, increase the number of beds in residential drug treatment centers, and make improvements to the statewide crisis hotline

The city health department will also receive \$750,000 to buy 20,000 doses of naloxone, the drug used to reverse an opioid overdose that health officials have had to ration because of a shortage. The city will get another \$830,429 to fund treatment programs and other efforts to curb the number of opioid deaths and overdoses. City officials can also apply for grants that would make them eligible for up to \$6 million in total funding, said Katie Kuehn, communications director with the state's opioid operational command center. The grant money is not guaranteed, however.

City Health Commissioner Dr. Leana Wen said that although the money would help efforts to fight the opioid epidemic, the city should have received a larger proportion because it has been hit harder by the crisis than any other jurisdiction.

There were 2,089 overdose deaths in Maryland last year, and 694 — or about one in three — occurred in Baltimore, according to state statistics. That amounts to two overdoses a day, Wen said.

"We thank the state for heeding our call for help," Wen said. "These resources are an important step in the right direction. But we need far more funding, and so we look forward to working with the state to secure additional funding that we need in this public health epidemic."

The Hogan administration did not respond to questions about Wen's request for additional funds.

The money given to the different jurisdictions will be used for prevention, enforcement, and treatment efforts throughout the state. Some will go to health departments and some will go to service providers. A total of \$4 million will go to local opioid intervention teams that will decide how best to use the money.

Owen McEvoy, a spokesman for Anne Arundel County, said its team meets Saturday and will likely discuss how to use the new funds. The county received about \$287,000 for its intervention team.

"These are much-needed resources that will drastically help us as we hope to turn the tide against this epidemic," he said.

Baltimore County received about \$470,000 for its intervention team.

"Having this public health and safety issue recognized and responded to with financial assistance is a step forward in healing the ills of opioid addiction," Dr. Gregory Wm. Brand, director of the Baltimore County Department of Health and Human Services, said in a statement. "The additional funding will be utilized to expand necessary efforts and initiatives; however, more resources are vital to comprehensively addressing this epidemic."

Baltimore officials plan to open the sobering center at the old Hebrew Orphan Asylum in West Baltimore, where they can serve people in a place dedicated to helping addicts rather than having them end up in

emergency rooms.

"This new funding will make real differences in people's lives as we work together to turn the tide in this deadly fight," Gov. [Larry Hogan](#) said in a statement.

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An earlier version of this article incorrectly described the percentage of the state funds going to local jurisdictions. The Baltimore Sun regrets the error.

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